

A STUDY OF STRESS AMONG FIRST AND SECOND YEAR GRADUATE
STUDENTS AT ATLANTA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract

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A Study of Stress Among First and Second Year Graduate Students at
Atlanta University School of Social Work

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This study attempted to answer the following questions: (1) What is the level of stress among first and second year graduate students? (2) What are the students perceived somatic reactions to stress? (3) What are some of the sources of stress identified by the students? Chi square and percentages were used to analyze the data.

The major findings of the study as follows: (1) First and Second year graduate students experience a moderate level of stress, (2) Somatic reactions to stress include, nervous stomach, sweating palms, lump in throat, increased heart rate, among others, and (3) Sources that cause excessive stress among students are Personal Finances, Academic Finances, Academics, Housing, Family, Personal, Relationships and School Environment.

Concentration: Policy Planning and Administration

Substantive Area: Child and Family Services

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	10
III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	27
IV. THE METHODOLOGY	29
V. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS	37
VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	49
BIBLIOGRAPHY	51
APPENDICES	60

LIST OF TABLES

1. Description of Population.....	38
2. Stress Level by Year of Enrollment.....	39
3. Level of Stress by Marital Status.....	40
4. Level of Stress by Sex.....	40
5. Level of Stress by Housing Arrangement.....	40
6. Somatic Reactions to Stress by Year of Enrollment.....	41
7. Family Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment.....	42
8. Housing Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment.....	43
9. Personal Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment.....	44
10. Relationship Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment.....	44
11. Academic Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment.....	45
12. School Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment.....	45
13. Academic Financial Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment.....	46
14. Personal Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment.....	46
15. General Factors Causing Excessive Stress for Both Years of Enrollment.....	47

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Chapter I

Introduction

The term stress has not been clearly defined in social science research. It has been used by social scientists to refer to such concepts as anxiety, depression and difficulty, as well as others. Due to the different uses of the term, the scope and applicability of stress has remained elusive. However, in spite of this elusiveness, universal; everyone experiences it. It is an intrinsic part of being human and its inevitable as a person experiences strains and tensions in all aspects of life.¹ For example, a person may experience such events as death, loss of a job, or change in marital status, often referred to as life events. Life events are a universal human phenomenon so common that the average person can not live a year without experiencing at least one or two.² Therefore, for purposes of this study, stress was defined as the occurrence of life events believed to be stressful.

Stressful life events that affect one individual minimally, may affect another individual with much greater intensity. When exposed to stress, the body experiences

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Barbara Gunnings, "Stress and the Minority Student on a Predominantly White Campus," Journal of Minority Concerns 2 (October 1981): 11.

2 Ramiro Valdez, "First Year Doctoral Students and Stress," College Student Journal 16 (Spring 1982): 30.

logical responses, such as a nervous stomach, sweating palms, or increased heart rate.³ Lazarus has suggested that different situations can produce individual patterns of stress reactions and that different individuals are susceptible to different patterns.⁴ In addition, Dr. Hans Selye, a recognized leading authority on the subject of stress, contends that the body is not built to take too much stress, and that the effects of stress may be long-lasting, even after the stressor has ceased to act.⁵ He further contends that stress can take years off a person's life by draining his capacity to withstand.⁶ Similarly, Walter B. Cannon, an American Physiologist contends that somatic responses to stress results in physiological changes that may increase the wear and tear on the body.⁷ Dr. Robert S. Eliot, further emphasized the dangers of too much stress, in his study of over 4000 men and women. His findings showed that stress can cause sudden death and people whos' bodies react strongly to stress are more suceptible

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Robert Stern and J. David Higgins, "Perceived Somatic Reactions to Stress: Sex, Age and Familial Occurrence", Journal of Psychosomatic Research 13 (September 1969): 78.

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John Barrow, "Educational Programming in Stress Management", Journal of College Student Personnel 22 (January 1981): 17-18.

5

Hans Selye, Stress Without distress (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1974). p. 17.

6

Linda Pembroke, How to Beat Fatigue (New York: Double Day and Company, Inc., 1975), p. 148.

7

Aaron Antonovsky, Health, Stress and Coping (San Francisco: JosseyBass Publishers, 1979), p.76.

logical responses, such as a nervous stomach, sweating palms, or increased heart rate.³ Lazarus has suggested that different situations can produce individual patterns of stress reactions and that different individuals are susceptible to different patterns.⁴ In addition, Dr. Hans Selye, a recognized leading authority on the subject of stress, contends that the body is not built to take too much stress, and that the effects of stress may be long-lasting, even after the stressor has ceased to act.⁵ He further contends that stress can take years off a person's life by draining his capacity to withstand.⁶ Similarly, Walter B. Cannon, an American Physiologist contends that somatic responses to stress results in physiological changes that may increase the wear and tear on the body.⁷ Dr. Robert S. Eliot, further emphasized the dangers of too much stress, in his study of over 4000 men and women. His findings showed that stress can cause sudden death and people whos' bodies react strongly to stress are more suceptible

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to disease.⁸ Therefore, it is important that individuals are aware of their somatic reactions to stress, and realize that too much stress, will eventually affect both their mental and physical health.

Stress is nothing new to humanity, it was first identified by Dr. Hans Selye, as a result of any life changes that disturb the homeostasis of the body.⁹ Stress can be identified with all major and minor life events, for example: the birth of a child, marriage, death, graduation, the prom, a football game, etc. Stress has been generally accepted as a part of growing up and preparing for life. Today, stress is surfacing in more recognizable ways, and is compounded by the unique problems of the 80's, such as drug abuse, unemployment etc.

It has been noted that "schools" comprise some of the highest stress ecologies in our society.¹⁰ These stresses are not described in a catalogue, nor openly acknowledged in schools, though faculty and administrators often have some sensitivity to its presence.¹¹ Thus, there is a need to identify the specific sources that students perceive as stressful in their academic careers.

⁸"Stress Can Cause Death," The Atlanta Journal, 29 March, 1984, p.3C.

⁹Barrow, "Educational Programming in Stress Management," p.17.

¹⁰Gail Freedman, Barry Lehrar and James Stevens, "The Effectiveness of Self-directed and Lecture of Control of Teachers," American Educational Research Journal 20 (Winter 1983): 563.

¹¹Lawrence Dennis and Joseph Kauffman, eds., The College and the Student (Washington, D.C. American Council on Education, 1966), p.349.

Americans value and place great faith in the educational system, and today, this system stands as a concrete testimonial of this steady faith. This educational system includes nursery schools, elementary schools, high schools, colleges and universities, as well as, professional and technical schools.

With the changes in broadened opportunities, increasing rate of unemployment, urgent contemporary problems of economic growth, social need and inflation, there has been an increasing need for education beyond the bachelors' degree. In today's society, there is a growing proportion of vocations and occupations which require graduate or professional school training.

Graduate students are not immune to stress. They are in a situation where perhaps their entire future may be dependent on how well they do. By that very fact, it can not help but be a very stressful situation.¹² In the students' work, stress disorder interferes markedly with the capacity to work, and has a notable consequence in terms of productive efficiency.¹³ The stresses are often counter productive to the leisure and calm that yields fresh ideas.¹⁴ When the level of stress is high, the students' decision-

¹²David Mechanic, A Study in the Social Psychology of Adaptation (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 61.

¹³Society for Psychosomatic Research, The Nature of Stress Disorder (London: Hutchinson Medical Publications, 1959), p. 149.

¹⁴Rodney Hartnett and Joseph Katz, "The Education of Graduate Students," Journal of Higher Education XLVIII (November/December 1977): 657.

making and problem-solving capabilities are reduced.¹⁵

Graduate students must deal daily with stress-provoking components¹⁶. These components are internal and external to the school environment. Some examples of internal stress-provoking components are: peer pressure; strains and tensions that accompany course examinations; sexual adjustments and difficulties in keeping up with the academic standards of the institution. There are also external stress-provoking components confronting graduate students, such as, difficulties involved in maintaining stable, supportive family relationships back home, faculty contacts, lack of support systems as well as other sources that may cause anxiety or stress for graduate students.

The graduate school experience is one in which the career-oriented individual looks forward to with high hopes and great expectations. However, the student is also confronted with uncertainty of success, competency and in attaining prestige or esteem. Each of these sources may cause some aspects of stress and strain in different ways for the individual students. Graduate students must realize that although stress is inevitable, the body is not built to take too much and that too much stress, will eventually affect both the individuals' mental and physical health.

¹⁵Leo Goldberger and Shlomo Brenitz, Handbook of Stress (New York: The Free Press, 1982), p. 70.

¹⁶Gunnings, "Stress and ther Minority Student on a Predominantly White Campus", p. 14.

Statement of the Problem

The graduate student is generally in the young adulthood stage (ages 19-25) in his/her development. During this period, personal aspirations, problems of society, development of independence, career choices, mate selection and feelings of insecurity are paramount considerations. All of these factors and more, become natural sources of stress. It is therefore the researchers' position that these sources and others, the somatic (bodily) reactions, as well as, the level of stress among graduate students, should be identified. The rationale for such a study, is that too much stress interferes with the students' ability to take full advantage of their educational situations. Data that was derived from this study, will enable social work educators and other human service workers to identify those stressors that are directly related to graduate education and to assist the students in coping with the stress inherent in the graduate school experience.

The primary purpose of this study was to increase the awareness of stress among first and second year graduate students, by identifying their perceived level of stress, somatic reactions to stress and sources perceived as stressful.

A second purpose of this study was to provide data that would assist social work educators in their awareness of the level, sources and somatic reactions to stress among graduate students, and enable them to develop a rational, flexible plan to assist graduate students in coping with stress. This study answers the following questions:

1. What is the perceived level of stress among first and second year graduate students?

Definitions of Key Concepts

STRESS:	The occurrence of life events believed to be difficult for most people. ¹⁷
LEVEL OF STRESS:	The measurements will be students' scores on the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale. (measures will be rated as major, moderate, and mild) ¹⁸
SOURCES OF STRESS:	Specific stressors that cause anxiety or stress. ¹⁹
SOMATIC REACTIONS:	Physiological (bodily) change recordings of individuals under various stress conditions. ²⁰ Various types of body reactions most likely to be perceived in a stress situation. ²¹
GRADUATE STUDENTS:	First and second year students at Atlanta University School of Social Work.

¹⁷ David Mechanic, "The Measurement of Stress and Social Readjustment", Journal of Human Stress 1 (September 1975): 43.

¹⁸ Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe, "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale", Journal of Psychosomatic Research 11 (August 1977): 213.

¹⁹ Blake Boyle and Robert Coombs, "Personality Profiles Related to Emotional Stress in the Initial Year of Medical Training", Journal of Medical Education 46 (October 1971): 883.

²⁰ Stern and Higgins, "Perceived Somatic Reactions to Stress: Sex, Age and Familial Occurrence", p. 77.

²¹ Robert Berger and Ronald Federico, Human Behavior (New York: Longman 1982), p. 105.

- COPING: Developing an overall plan of action for overcoming stresses which is based on rationality, flexibility and farsightedness.²²
- YOUNG ADULTHOOD: A transitional era between youth and adulthood.²³ The growing person as a life-system related to a configuration of a field of influences and forces,²⁴ between the ages of (19-25).

²²Ibid.

²²Theodore Lidz, *The Person* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), p. 122.

²³Ibid., p. 110.

Chapter II

The review of the literature will address studies that emphasize the level, sources and somatic (bodily) reactions to stress.

The Literature Review

In understanding the present state of stress research, it is recognized that the overwhelming interest and effort in the field is connected with psychological stress and its impact upon the organism. However, it must also be understood, that it is extremely difficult to make a thorough investigation of all the components of stress in any study. Consequently, researchers tend to selectively focus their attention on the aspects of stress which are of particular interest and are relevant to specific research questions.²⁵ Research over the years, in the area of stress, has been limited by the inadequacy of research instruments that could be used in investigations of large populations. In 1967, Holmes and Rahe developed a standard model which could be generalizable over individuals and across different cultural groups.²⁶ A great deal of recent research has been stimulated as a result of their development of the Social Readjustment Rating Scale.

²⁵T.L.T. Horn, "Adjustment to the Stressful Life Changes Associated with Beginning Graduate School", (Thesis, Georgia State University, 1982), p.22.

²⁶E. K. Eric Gunderson and Richard Rahe, eds., Life Stress and Illness (Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, 1974), p. 81.

Very little attention, however, has been given to the aspects of stress among graduate students. More attention has been given to stress among undergraduate students than among graduate students. Some of the researchers that dealt primarily with stress among undergraduate populations include: Hammen and Cochran; Nowack and Hanson; Williams, Decker and Libassi.

Hammen and Cochran emphasized the role of cognition in recent life stress levels of undergraduate students. The results suggested that highly stressed students have experienced stressful life events.²⁷ Nowack and Hanson also studied stress among undergraduate populations. Their results suggest that stress is both frequent and severe in student populations.²⁸ In addition, William, Decker and Libassi results showed that stress intereferes with the students' capacity to perform at their highest level of achievement.²⁹ Although these researchers dealth primarily with undergraduate populations, their findings suggest that stress is experienced during the academic careers of students, therefore inclusive of graduate student populations. Similarly, David Mechanic stated that there is a definite correlation between life events and the amount of stress all students undergo. He has established that graduate students experience difficult and trying challenges, as well as, major changes during their careers as students.

²⁷Constance Hammen and Susan Cochran, "Cognitive Correlates of Life Stress and Depression in College Students", Journal of Abnormal Psychology 90 (February 1981): 25-26.

²⁸Kenneth Nowack and Alan Hanson, "The Relationship Between Stress, Job Performance, and Burnout in College Student Residential Assistants", Journal of College Student Personnel 24 (November 1983): 548.

²⁹John Williams, Thomas Decker and Anthony Libassi, "The Impact of Stress Management Training on the Academic Performance of Low-Achieving College Students", Journal of College Student Personnel 24 (November 1983): 494.

He also contends, that students in general, experience stresses that in other environments would not be significant.³⁰ This was emphasized further, by Fredrick McGuire, who noted that stress is inherent throughout the graduate school experience. His analysis of graduate students as objects, suggested that the student is placed under a great deal of stress and that the graduate years are demanding, physically, intellectually and emotionally. He further stated that graduate students encounter new stresses throughout the curriculum, as well as, in their own personal lives.³¹

Recent research among graduate populations has included certain aspects of stress, such as, the level, sources and somatic reactions. Ramiro Valdez utilized the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale, in a study of 33 graduate students of social work. By using this scale, Valdez was able to determine the level of stress among the first year students. He hypothesized that first year students experience a moderate or major crisis. He based his hypothesis on the assumption that graduate students experience stress upon entering the graduate environment. His results showed that first year graduate students experience a high level of stress.³²

In a similar study, conducted at the University of Minnesota, the results also showed that first year graduate students experience a high level of stress. However, the researcher, Rosenberg, also included second year

³⁰Ramiro Valdez, "First Year Doctoral Students and Stress", College Student Journal 16 (Spring 1982): 31.

³¹Fredrick McGuire, "Psycho-Social Studies of Medical Students: A Critical Review", Journal of Medical Education 41 (May 1966): 433.

³²Valdez, "First Year Doctoral Students and Stress". pp. 30-37.

students, giving a total of forty-five participants. The results showed that the level of stress was the same for both years. In his analysis, he noted that the students' developmental stage demands and reinforces the stress experienced by those students.³³

In contrast, David Mechanic proposed, that second year students have already invested considerable time, money and effort in their training, and therefore, must be under considerable stress. However, the results of his study of 19 first and second year graduate students, showed that primarily, second year students experienced low stress.³⁴

Contrasting results were found in a study of 33 graduate students at Georgia State University. Horn conducted an exploratory study of stress among graduate students, in which the analysis suggested that the changes that occurred during the first year were far less stressful than those that occurred during the second year. He concluded that the stresses that occurred during the second year were the source of significant increase in the amount of stress experienced by students.³⁵

In a similar analysis of students under stress, it was found that a major stress point in the lives of graduate students occur around the time of graduation. DeArmond concluded that many of the old issues, fears, dreads and guilts that students felt during the beginning of graduate school, are revived when students anticipate

³³Pearl Rosenberg, "Students Perceptions and Concerns During Their First Year in Medical School," Journal of Medical Education 46 (March 1971): 216.

³⁴David Mechanic, Students Under Stress (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 23.

³⁵Horn, "Adjustment to Stressful Life Changes Associated With Beginning Graduate School," p. 34

assuming responsibility in their chosen professions.³⁶

Still, similar results were found in a study of 220 graduate students at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Huebner, Royer and Moore described major sources of stress perceived by the students. In their analysis, stress was found to increase with the span of time in graduate school. They noted also, that the sources selected by the students were those that paralleled with the curriculum for that particular year.³⁷

Moore-West, Jackson, Kaufman, Obenshain, Galey, O'Donnell and West, also found that stress increases with the years in graduate school. They surveyed 49 students, and the results showed that the level of stress was significantly higher for second year students than for first year students. The analysis also suggested that student stress is reflective of a particular educational environment and is changeable according to phases in the curriculum. They concluded that stress can be associated with significantly different sources, according to the phase of the educational curriculum.³⁸

Similar to the previous studies, Sacks, Frosch, Kesselman and Parker found that in many cases, stress can be related to the educa-

³⁶Murray DeArmond, "Stress Among Medical Students," Arizona Medicine 37 (March 1980): 169.

³⁷Dr. A. Huebner, Jerry Royer and James Moore, "The Assessment and Remediation of Dysfunctional Stress in Medical School," Journal of Medicine Educational 56 (July 1981): 557.

³⁸Maggi Moore-West; R. Jackson; A. Kaufman; S. Obenshain; W. Galey; M. O'Donnell and D. West, "Reduced Stress in Medical Education: An outcome of Altered Learning Environment", Journal of Research and Development in Education 16 (Fall 1983): pp 32-36.

tional curriculum in graduate education. This finding was a result of their case studies on the life experiences of particular stress experienced by graduate students at State University of New York.³⁹

To identify some of the sources inherent in the graduate environment and core curriculum, Edwards and Zimet, designed a questionnaire through informal discussions with students. They surveyed 288 graduate students at the University of Colorado. Their results showed that a high porportion of students suffer from academic pressures and financial problems, as well as, inadequate housing.⁴⁰

In contrast, Davidson also studied the sources of stress among graduate students. He surveyed 55 students at Baylor College, in which the results showed, that family stresses, personal stresses and stresses in relationships were most prominent sources of stress among the student body.⁴¹

Somewhat similar to the previous studies, Jacqueline Fleming examined the different sources of stress at two large urban Southwestern Universities. Her analysis, however, revealed that academic sources and school related sources were identified as those causing the most stress. Fleming utilized the theory of human development, including Eric Erickson as her main theorist. In her survey of 118 students, the results confirmed that the transition to adulthood is indeed a critical

³⁹Michael Sacks, W. Frosch; M. Kesselman and L. Parker, "Psychiatric Problems in Medical Students," American Journal of Psychiatry 7 (July 1980): 882.

⁴⁰Marc Edwards and Carl Zimet, "Problems and Concerns Among Medical Students," Journal of Medical Education 51 (August 1976): pp 623-624.

⁴¹Virginia Davidson, "Coping Styles of Women Medical Students," Journal of Medical Education 53 (November 1978): 906.

period, therefore, she concluded, stress is inevitable in the academic lives of students.⁴²

The literature has thus far, revealed that it is important to note not only the level of stress among graduate students, but to identify the specific sources of stress inclusive of the academic and the educational environment. In addition, Horn has noted that in order to fully understand the dynamics of stress, it is necessary, not only to attend to the sources of the stimulus, but, there is also a need to investigate the kind of bodily reactions experienced by the individual.⁴³ However, few researchers have included this important aspect of stress due to the lack of measureable instruments. It has been established by Gunderson and Rahe, that the scientific study of stress and bodily changes that accompany diverse emotional experiences mark a new era in medicine.⁴⁴

In a recent study of perceived physiological reactions to stress, Stern and Higgins made use of a newly developed somatic perception questionnaire. Their search of the literature for studies which included reports of bodily changes under stress revealed no such investigations. Thus, resulted their development of a somatic perception questionnaire. A total of 617 college students participated in the survey. The results showed that males and females reported a significant

⁴²Jacqueline Fleming, "Stress and Satisfaction in College Years of Black Students," The Journal of Negro Education 50 (September 1981): 318.

⁴³Horn, "Adjustment to Stressful Life Changes Associated With Beginning Graduate School," p.14

⁴⁴Eric Gunderson and Richard Rahe, Life Stress and Illness (Illinois Charles C. Thomas Publishers, 1974), p. 22.

difference in the type of bodily reactions perceived during stressful situations.⁴⁵

Guthrie, Verstrate, Deines and Stern also studied somatic reactions to stress. Their purpose was to demonstrate that perceptions of bodily changes when under stress, cluster across societies. They utilized the Somatic Perception Questionnaire in a survey of young adult college students in four societies. The societies included the United States, France, Haiti and the Phillipines. Their results suggested, that while the patterning of physiological responses vary from one society to another, there are similar constellations across societies.⁴⁶

More recently, Myers, Bastein and Miles also utilized the Somatic Perception Questionnaire in a survey of 191 students. They purposed that regardless of the sources of stress studies, it is important that studies on the contribution of stress take into account the differences in responses to stress. To complete their study, they also utilized the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale, to obtain the students' level of stress. The results suggested that experienced stress, characteristic patterns of reacting to those stresses and responses occurred concurrent with or as a result from facing personally significant levels of life event stresses.⁴⁷

As stated before, it is extremely difficult to make a thorough investigation of all the components of the stress process in any one

⁴⁵Robert Stern and David Higgins, "Perceived Somatic Reactions to Stress," Journal of Psychosomatic Research 13 (September 1969): 78.

⁴⁶George Guthrie; A. Verstraete; M. Deines and R. Stern, "Symptoms of Stress in Four Societies," The Journal of Social Psychology 95 (June 1975): 171.

study. However, in this review of the literature, it has been noted, that it is important that graduate students are aware of the stresses that they experience. Therefore, a study that identifies their perception of their stress levels is a needed investigation.

It has also been established, that students experience stresses in the educational environment, that in other environments would not be significant. Therefore, it is important that research on stress among student populations, include those sources of stress that are particular to an educational environment.

Finally, according to the literature, in order to fully understand the dynamics of stress, it is necessary to include the somatic (bodily) reactions to stress, experienced by the individuals studied. Therefore, a study that includes these three components, the levels, sources and somatic reactions to stress, is a justifiable and needed investigation.

⁴⁷Hector Myers, Rochelle Bastien and Ralph Miles, "Life Stress, Health and Blood pressure in Black College Students," Journal of Black Psychology 9 (February 1983): 19.

SUMMARY

The literature review revealed that stress exists among graduate students. Studies seem to indicate that graduate students experience significantly high levels of stress throughout their academic careers. Studies further indicate that sources of stress are related to a particular academic environment, curriculum, and to the personal lives of graduate students. It is therefore pertinent that any research on stress among graduate students, include sources that relate to the educational environment, the curriculum and students' personal lives.

Several studies show that first year graduate students experience high levels of stress, while others show that second year graduate students experience significantly high levels of stress. The literature also included studies that suggest that it is important to find out the specific sources of stress among students. Studies have shown that family stresses, personal stresses, stresses in relationships, academic stresses, financial problems and inadequate housing among others, are prominent sources of stress among graduate students. The literature also indicates the need for further investigation on the individual's bodily reactions to stress. It is also noted, that few investigators have included this important aspect of stress, therefore, more research which includes this important aspect must be generated to lessen this deficit in the literature.

Chapter III

The theoretical framework will consist of developmental theories that address specific life tasks and stresses that are present in accomplishing these tasks. The primary focus of attention will be on the young adulthood stage, which covers the ages of 19-25.

The primary theorist for this study is Erick Erickson. Other theorists include Gail Sheehy, Theodore Lidz and Robert Havighurst. Several views from educators and practitioners, relating stress to young adulthood will also be presented.

The average graduate student is within the young adulthood stage (ages 19-25). The theories of human development, specifically, during this stage of young adulthood, addresses the special predicament of graduate students, and the sources of stress that are present during this time. The researcher will present the views of a number of theorists that identify the specific tasks to be accomplished during this stage of development.

Gail Sheehy, one such theorist, contends that the tasks for young adults are as enormous as they are stressful. She expounded on these tasks by naming a few:

1. To shape a dream--that vision of one's own possibilities in the world that will generate energy, aliveness and hope.
2. To prepare for a life work.
3. To find a mentor if possible.
4. To form the capacity for intimacy, without losing in the process, whatever constancy of 'self' already gained.

According to Sheehy, the young adulthood period of development means

mastering what one feels' he/she is suppose to do, as well as, trying to prove oneself competent in a large society, while at the same time, ⁴⁸ intensely aware of being on trial.

Similar to Sheehy, Theodore Lidz has also suggested some tasks that are accomplished during the young adulthood stage of development. Lidz contends that the time comes during the young adult stage, for individuals to make their own way in the world, no longer delaying this by lingering in the protection of the homes. She further states that the young adults' independence from the parental family motivates him/her to achieve an interdependence with others and find a place in society. According to Lidz, the following are tasks for the young adult.

1. Choice of an occupation
2. To share with another in marriage
3. To produce and nurture a new generation
4. To attain stable positions in life.

Lidz emphasizes that young adults must focus their energies and interests even more definitely as they commit themselves to a specific way of life, now more than ever, alternative ways of life must be renounced to permit the singleness of purpose required for success and to consolidate ⁴⁹ ones' identity.

⁴⁸
Gail Sheehy, Passages New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976), pp. 84-85.

⁴⁹
Theodore Lidz, The Person (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 376-390.

Another leading theorist of human development is Robert Havighurst. Havighurst has been the prime influence in the formulation of the young adult developmental task concept. One of the earliest to describe an age group between adolescence and adulthood, he believes that young adulthood is a time in which some of the most important decisions of life are made.⁵⁰ What he has termed, 'the most important tasks of life,' are as follows:

1. Selecting a mate
2. Learning to live with a married partner
3. Starting a family
4. Rearing children
5. Managing a home
6. Getting started in an occupation
7. Taking on civic responsibility
8. Finding a congenial social group.

According to Havighurst, young adulthood is the most individualistic period of life and the loneliest one. He has established that young adulthood is a period of storm and stress in America.⁵¹

In contrast to Havighurst, who emphasizes the outside demands which an individual must meet before he is ready to move ahead in the

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Allen Moore, The Young Generation (Nashville: Abington Press, 1969), p. 106.

51

Robert Havighurst, Human Development and Education (New York: David McKay Company, 1953), pp. 257-259.

human life cycle, Erickson centers upon the inside crisis of human

⁵² development. His psychosocial approach to human development is particularly in accord with the human services, because of its' attention to the individual and his environment. His scheme, the unfolding of the human system is seen as a combination of maturation, socialization

⁵³ and education. The tasks that Erickson depicts for this stage of development, is that of intimacy versus isolation.

"Real intimacy is only possible once a reasonable sense of identity has been established. Only one who is secure with ones' identity is able to lose oneself in true mutuality with another, to the extent that people fail to attain genuine mutuality, they experience the opposite pole of this stage--isolation and self-absorption. The utopia of genitality (reproduction) is by no means purely sexual matter. True intimacy means that two people are willing to share and mutually regulate all important aspects of their lives."⁵⁴

The danger of this stage, according to Erickson, is the possible psychosocial isolation--that is, the avoidance of contacts which commit to intimacy. Isolation can lead to severe character problems which

52

Moore, The Young Generation, p. 107.

53

Ralph Anderson and Irl Carter, Human Behavior in the Social Environment (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1978), P. 130.

54

William Crain, Theories of Development (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1980), pp. 157-158.

interfere with love and work. He further emphasizes that each person must translate this order into his own terms so as to make it amenable to whatever kind of trait inventory, objective or educational goal is his main concern.⁵⁵

According to Erickson, the tasks, for the young adult stage, can not be accomplished until after a reasonable sense of identity has been established. His concept of identity is that internal and external tensions press the human system to reintegrate its' component parts to undertake new purposes and responsibilities. This identity is a steady state of the personality system. The steady state occurs when the whole system is in balance.⁵⁶ Stress occurs when there is an imbalance between the demand and the response capabilities of the focal organism.⁵⁷ This stress is a threat to the fulfillment of basic needs, the maintenance of regulated functioning and to growth and development.⁵⁸

Erickson holds that the young adult must translate tasks into his own terms. In other words, as has been illustrated through Sheehy, Lidz and Havinghurst, as well as, Erickson, certain tasks must be accomplished in order to move with any semblance of adequacy from young

55

Martin Bloom, Life Span Development (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 26-27.

56

Anderson, Human Behavior in the Social Environment, p. 132.

57

Horn, "Adjustment to the Stressful Life Changes Associated With Beginning Graduate School," p. 14

58

Harold Basowitz; H. Persky; S. Korchin and R. Grinker, Anxiety and Stress (New York: McGraw Hill, 1955), p. 8.

adulthood into adulthood. Each task requires a fundamental decision, but within that decision lies the potential for success or failure. Erickson understands this crisis in development as turning points or as crucial periods of increased vulnerability and heightened potential for stress during a time of necessary change. In his view, the crisis occur at its' proper time out of the interaction of the organisms' maturation, dependent upon the personality resources the individual has accrued up to that point, as well as, the opportunities and resources available in his social situation.⁵⁹

According to the theorists presented in this chapter, the tasks for the young adulthood stage are both enormous, as well as, stressful. Several educators and practitioners have agreed with this theory and many of them have related it to the graduate student. One such educator, Dr. Harold Visotsky, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavior Sciences at North Western University, has stated that young adulthood has become a very stressful stage in the human life cycle.⁶⁰ Anne Taylor, Assistant Professor of English, Oregon State University, made a similar statement when she related young adulthood to graduate students. She stated that students may be frustrated and anxious about their inability to assume an "adult role."⁶¹ She stated further,

59

Anderson, Human Behavior in the Social Environment, p. 132.

60

John Scanlon, Young Adulthood (USA: Academy for Educational Development, 1979), p. 96.

61

Susan Rimmer, Michael Lammert and Patricia McClain, "An Assessment of Graduate Student Needs," College Students Journal 16 (Summer 1982): p. 187.

"graduate students are young adults who are in an uneasy place in relation to adulthood, neither fully adults nor yet children."⁶²

Similarly, Annette Church, Director, Student Crisis Service, Atlanta University, has stated, "for graduate students, the young adulthood period can be identified as particularly stressful." She continued, "the graduate student experiences some difficulty in learning how to deal with stress." She continued further, by naming some of the sources of graduate student stress, such as, academic pressures, financial problems, making friends, and other personal and relationship oriented problems.⁶³

These educators and practitioners have emphasized the fact that graduate students will encounter stress during their academic careers and in the attainment of success during this change point known as the state of young adulthood. To further emphasize this, Dr. Hans Selye stated:

"Mans ultimate aim in life is to express himself as fully as possible, according to his own lights, and to achieve a sense of security. To accomplish this, he must first find out his optimal stress level, and then use his adaptive energy at a rate and in a direction adjusted to his innate qualifications and preferences. Whatever goals strived for, the relationships between stress and

62

Anne Taylor, "The Graduate Experience," Personnel and Guidance Journal 54 (September 1975): p. 35.

63

Interview with Annette Church, MSW, Director, Student Crisis Services, A.U.C., Atlanta, Georgia, 7 October 1983.

attainment of success is so evident that it hardly justifies lengthy discussion."⁶⁴

Therefore, a study of stress among graduate students that identifies not only the level of stress, but the somatic reactions and sources of stress, that are directly related to graduate education, is of particular importance to social work educators.

The dependent variable for this study is stress. This is a descriptive study of the level, sources and somatic reactions to stress as perceived by graduate students at Atlanta University School of Social Work.

This study has three hypotheses:

1. There is no difference in the level of stress among first and second year graduate students
2. There is no difference in the somatic reactions to stress among first and second year graduate students
3. There is no difference in the sources of stress among first and second year graduate students.

Summary

Several theorists, Sheehy, Lidz, Havinghurst and Erickson have suggested specific tasks to be accomplished during the young adulthood stage of development. Erickson's theory of human development was highlighted because of his psychosocial approach to human development and his attention to the individual and his environment. According to Erickson, the tasks of young adulthood can not be accomplished until after a reasonable sense of identity has been established. He also acknowledges that stress upsets the steady state of the human system causing an imbalance.

In addition to these theorists, educators, including, Dr. Visotsky, Anne Taylor, and Annette Church concurs that stress is very prevalent among graduate students.

Chapter IV

The Methodology

This chapter will present the setting of the study, the population, description of the instruments and their reliability and validity, methods of data collection and statistical procedures used in a study of stress among first and second year graduate students at Atlanta University School of Social Work.

Selection of Respondents

The selection of respondents for this study included the total population of full-time first and second year graduate students who entered Atlanta University School of Social Work during the fall semesters of 1983 and 1982, respectively. This population consisted of 19 available first year students and 33 available second year students. The total population surveyed consisted of 52 graduate students, of which, 38 consented to participate.

The Population

The population of 38 respondents consisted of 9 (24 percent) males and 29 (76 percent) females. Fourteen (37 percent) were first year students, and 24 (63 percent) were second year students.

Setting of the Study

The setting chosen for this study was Atlanta University School of Social Work. This is the oldest predominantly Black school of

Social Work in the country, and has produced some of the nations top social workers for 63 years. Established in 1920 as an independent institution, the School of Social Work was accredited in 1928, and became a part of the University Center in 1947.

It is the school's fundamental belief that the function of an institution is to infuse life with a quality of meaning which accentuates its social value. Hence, the institution is viewed as a social instrument directed toward the enhancement of the individual human experience to the ultimate benefit of the whole society.

As a part of the mission to establish objectives and program dimensions, four essential threads evolved as basic components of the schools perspectives:

1. Humanistic Values
2. The Afro-Centric Perspective
3. Autonomous Social Work Practice
4. Planned Change

These threads were directed toward undergirding those offerings supportive of practitioner product outcomes, especially those most closely aligned to the knowledge, skills and value base necessary to effectively address the particular life conditions of the target populations.⁶⁵

⁶⁵Atlanta University School of Social Work Educational Rationale, pp. 2-3.

Atlanta University is located less than two miles from the heart of the City of Atlanta, the business and cultural center of the South. In the immediate vicinity are five other institutions: Morehouse, Spelman, Clark, Morris Brown and the Interdenominational Theological Center.⁶⁶

Description of the Instruments

A total of three instruments were utilized in a study of stress among first and second year graduate students. The instruments included: The Social Readjustment Rating Scale; The Somatic Reaction Questionnaire; and The Source of Stress Student Questionnaire.

The Social Readjustment Rating Scale consists of 43 life event items. The events covered by the scale pertain the major areas of dynamic significance in the social structure of American way of life as well as cross-cultural regions. Each event is assigned weights, called life change units, whereas, a major level of stress = 300 plus, a moderate level of stress = 150-299, and a mild level of stress = less than 150.⁶⁷ The scale in its original form were adhered to in this study. The directions requested that each participant circle the events that occurred within the academic year, 1983-84. This scale measures the participants' perception of his/her stress level.

⁶⁶The University, Atlanta University Bulletin, p. 13.

⁶⁷Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe, "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale," Journal of Psychosomatic Research 11 (August 1967) p. 216.

Validity and Realibility

The validity and reliability of the Social Readjustment Rating Scale has been tested by Holmes and Rahe in several studies. One study compared adults and adolescents in which Spearmans Rho resulted in 0.97.⁶⁸ In another study, which the original sample was compared with a college population, again, Spearman's Rho resulted in 0.97. Still another study, that further emphasized the validity and reliability, was a cross-cultural comparison in which Spearman's Rho ranged from 0.629 to 0.943.⁶⁹ Therefore, the instrument appeared to be reliable for the purpose of this study.

Another questionnaire used in this study, was the Somatic Perception Questionnaire, designed by Landy and Stern. This instrument is a likert-type graphic rating scale with the following anchors: not at all, slightly, moderately, greatly and acutely. It is comprised of nine items: (1) face feels hot or flushed; (2) nervous stomach; (3) sweating palms; (4) lump in throat or dryness in mouth; (5) cold hands or feet; (6) general body sweating; (7) increased heart rate; (8) frequent urination; and (9) awareness of heart beat.⁷⁰ The participants were directed to circle the degree of their responses in situations such as: (a) before an exam, (b) before or during a

⁶⁸Libby Ruch and Thomas Homes, "Scaling of Life Change: Comparison of Direct and Indirect Methods," Journal of Psychosomatic Research 15 (June 1971): 22.

⁶⁹Thomas Holmes and Minora Masuda, Life Change and Illness Susceptibility, (n.p.: n.d; reprinted Separation and Death, publication no. 94, n.d.), pp. 168-171.

⁷⁰Frank Landy and Robert Stern, "Factor Analysis of a Somatic Perception Questionnaire," Journal of Psychosomatic Research 15, (March 1971): 179.

class presentation, (c) before or during a conference with faculty advisor, (d) failing a test, or (e) other academic situations deemed stressful. It is important to note that this scale measures the subjects' perception of their somatic reactions to stress.

The Somatic Perception questionnaire used in this study derived from an original 33 item questionnaire, of which the validity and reliability was tested by Landy and Stern. In testing the validity and reliability of the original scale, the termination of factoring was determined by a screen test and items greater than 0.40 fell within the range of +0.25 - +0.29. These items resulted in the 9-item scale, used in this study.⁷¹

A third questionnaire utilized in this study was the Source of Stress Student Questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed by this researcher through informal discussions with students, conferences with student advisors, consultation with the Student Crisis Center, and a review of the literature on stress experienced by graduate students. The resulting questionnaire consisted of 8 categories: Family; Housing; Personal; Relationships; Academic; School; Personal Finances; and Academic Finances. Each category included related items in which participants were instructed to rate each item using the following code: 0 = not a source of stress; 1 = source causing little stress; 2 = source causing moderate stress; and 3 = source causing excessive stress. A copy of this questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

⁷¹Ibid, p. 180

Data Collection

Data was obtained by distributing 52 questionnaire packages requesting respondents' perceptions of stress and demographics. A cover letter was attached to each questionnaire package. A copy of this letter is included in Appendix B.

The demographic information was obtained to show marital status, age, housing arrangements, sources of income, number of children, grade point average and to distinguish between first and second year students. The respondents were directed to select a pen name, and to check or circle the appropriate items for each question. A copy of this is included in Appendix A.

Procedure

Permission to conduct a study of stress among the graduate students at Atlanta University School of Social Work was obtained from the Dean of the school. Permission to use the Somatic Perception Questionnaire was obtained by telephone from Robert Stern, who forwarded the questionnaire by mail to the researcher. Permission to use the Social Readjustment Rating Scale was also obtained through telephone conversation with Thomas Holmes.

After receiving the necessary permissions, the researcher proceeded by obtaining a list of first and second year graduate students at the School of Social Work. A list was first obtained from the secretary of student affairs, but because it was incomplete and not up-to-date, a second list was obtained from the Schools' Practicum Department. The two lists were combined and the appropriate names were added or discarded for final list. After obtaining a final listing of

the students, the schools' registrar was consulted for a final counting, however; an up-to-date count was not available. Therefore, the researcher believes that the combined listing of students from the School of Social Work, were as up-to-date as could be determined. These events occurred during the months of December 1983, January 1984, and February 1984.

During the month of March 1984, it was determined by the researcher, that only 52 students were available for study purposes. Therefore, during the same month 52 students received questionnaire packages, consisting of 3 questionnaires, demographics, directions, and a cover letter.

The students living in the dormitory were issued questionnaires in person and asked to push them under the researchers' door when completed. Several off-campus students were contacted by telephone informing them of the study on stress among graduate students. They were asked to pick-up the questionnaires from student mail boxes and return them to researchers' mail box. Still, others received their questionnaires as the researcher came into contact with them, (ie., in class, on campus, in the library).

In order to distribute questionnaires to the first year students, permission was requested and granted from the skills lab instructors, to distribute them during class time. The questionnaires were given to the president of the first year class in a manila folder, including instructions, to distribute them during class time. The questionnaires were returned in a manila folder.

Each student listed on the final list of graduate students, received a questionnaire, their names were checked as they received

them. Several students enthusiastically completed the questionnaires right away, while others hesitated choosing to return them later. Three weeks after total distribution, those students that had not returned the questionnaires indicated to the researcher that they would complete them soon, many never did. A total of 38 out of 52 students responded to the questionnaires.

Statistical Procedures

The statistical procedures used to analyze the data include descriptive statistics. According to Herman Loether and Donald McIntosh, this is a method of describing collections of statistical observations, whether they are samples or total populations, also, comparisons can be made and measures of association can be created.⁷² This study included computation of chi square. Further statistical procedures included percents to describe demographics.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to thirty-eight graduate students of a private, predominantly Black institution. This represents 73 (percent) of the available population at Atlanta University School of Social Work. The findings can not be generalized to the total University population since the population was small and was not randomly sampled from the total population of Atlanta University, nor can they be generalized to other graduate institutions. A final limitation of this study is that the source of stress questionnaire was not tested for validity and reliability.

⁷²Herman Loether and Donald McTavish, Descriptive Statistics for Sociologists (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974), pp. 221-222.

Chapter V

Presentation of Results

The primary purpose of this study was to increase the awareness of stress among first and second year graduate students, by identifying their preceived level, somatic reactions and sources of stress.

In order to present a description of the population, respondents were separated by year of enrollment. Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents were female, 79 (percent) first year and 75 (percent) second year. The table also shows that 50 (percent) of first year respondents were single, 29 (percent) married and 21 (percent) divorced. Of the second year students, 75 (percent) were single, 25 (percent) married, and none were divorced. Thirty-six percent of the first year respondents had at least one child and 33 (percent) of second year students had at least one child. The mean age of the respondents was 29.2 for first year students and 24.8 for second year students. The housing arrangements of the respondents, included 50 (percent) first year students living in the dormitory and 46 (percent) of second year students. Twenty-one (percent) of the first year students reported having only one source of income, and 54 (percent) of second year students reported having only one source of income. The income sources included: grants; scholarships; loans; parents; spouses; full and part time work, as well as workstudy.

Table 1
Description of Population

		Frist Year	Second Year
SEX:	% female	79	75
	% male	21	25
MARITAL STATUS:	% single	50	75
	% married	29	25
	% divorced	21	0
CHILDREN:	% with at least one child	36	33
MEAN AGE:		29.2	24.8
HOUSING:	% in domitory	50	46
	% in own home	14	0
	% in Apartment	29	33
	% other	7	21
INCOME	% with only one source	21	46
	% with more than one source	79	54

The Level of Stress

In order to determine the level of stress for the population, chi square was computed. Table 2 shows that the majority of first and second year students experienced moderate levels of stress. The analysis also shows that there is no significant difference between the level of stress for first and second year graduate students.

Table 2
Stress Level by Year of Enrollment

	Major	Moderate	Mild	Total
First Year	3	9	2	14
Second Year	3	16	5	24
	6	15	7	38

$\chi^2 = 5.686$, not significant at .05

To further analyze the data for the level of stress, chi square was computed to find out if factors such as marital status, sex and housing arrangements made a difference in the level of stress among the two classes. Table 3, shows that marital status is not a significant factor in the level of stress. Table 4 also shows that sex, is not a significant factor in the level of stress among the students. However, Table 5 shows that the housing arrangements of the students is a significant factor in their level of stress.

Table 3
Level of Stress by Marital Status

	Major	Moderate	Mild	Total
Married	3	7	0	10
Single	2	16	7	25
Divorced	1	2	0	3
	6	25	7	38

$\chi^2 = 2.965$, not significant at .05

Table 4
Level of Stress by Sex

	Major	Moderate	Mild	Total
Male	2	5	2	9
Female	4	20	5	29
	6	25	7	38

$\chi^2 = .731$, not significant at .05

Table 5
Level of Stress by Housing Arrangements

	Major	Moderate	Mild	Total
Dormitory	3	12	3	18
Own Home	1	1	0	2
Apartment	1	3	9	12
Other	1	3	2	6
	6	25	7	38

$\chi^2 = 17.17$, significant at .05 and .01

Somatic Reactions to Stress

In order to determine the somatic reactions to stress among the respondents, chi square was computed for each of the nine items of the Somatic Perception Questionnaire, by year of enrollment of the students.

The results show that there is no difference between the somatic reactions to stress for the two classes, except for one item. First and second year students reported a difference in their reactions to stress for item #3, sweating palms. (See Table 6)

Table 6
Somatic Reactions to Stress by Year of Enrollment

Item	Chi Square
Face Feels Flushed	6.02
Nervous Stomach	9.39
Sweating Palms	12.6*
Lump in Throat or Dryness in Mouth	3.82
Cold Hands and/or Feet	6.51
General Body Sweating	10.38
Increased Heart Rate	3.66
Frequent Urination or Urge to Urinate	8.41
Awareness of Heart Rate	6.36

* χ^2 - Significant at .01

Sources of Stress

In order to compute the data for the sources of stress among the population, chi square was computed for each item under the eight categories of sources. Chi square was computed for the year enrollment of the respondents.

The items for the family category, showed no significant difference among the students. Table 7 shows these results.

Table 7
Family Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment

	Chi Square
Leaving Home	1.674
Demands from Family	5.85
Familys' Expectations	4.92
Disruptions in Family Routine	3.522
Death of Family	2.49

χ^2 - No significant difference

Table 8 shows that there is a difference among the students in the Housing category. Inadequate bathroom in the dormitory and lack of privacy showed significant difference as sources of stress between first and second year students. This may be attributed to the different types of housing accommodations among the students.

Table 8

Housing Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment

	Chi Square
Poor Housing Accomodations	2.97
Inadequate Bathroom in Dorm	*7.875
Lack of Privacy	**19.1
Roach/Rat Infestations	2.6
Inadequate Kitchen Equipment	2.43

* χ^2 - Significant at .05
 ** χ^2 - Significant at /05 and .01

Further analysis, showed that Personal sources, Relationship sources, Academic sources, School sources and Academic Financial sources were not significantly different sources of stress for first and second year graduate students. (See Tables 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13) However, the analysis of Personal Financial sources of stress showed a significant difference among first and second year graduate students. This is illustrated in Table 14.

Table 9

Personal Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment

	Chi Square
Inability to Concentrate	1.771
Lack of Motivation	6.88
Self-doubt	3.82
Poor Study Habits	3.784
Adjusting to Graduate School	2.39
Lack of Confidence	1.147
Lack of Adequate Time	1.747
Poor Preparation for Graduate School	2.05

χ^2 - Not significant at .05

Table 10

Relationship Sources of Stress
by Year of Enrollment

	Chi Square
Change in Social Activities	4.62
Finding New Friends	2.972
Limited Access to Students from other Schools	3.6
Lack of Understanding from Mate	3.4
Separation from Mate	4.5
Loneliness	2.7
Faculty/Student Relationships	1.92

Table 11

Academic Sources of Stress
by Year of Enrollment

	Chi Square
Failing a Test	1.568
Inability to Understand Assignments	1.834
Class Presentations	2.652
Substantive Paper/Thesis	6.68
Taking Exams	9.522
Communication Skills Exam	1.168
Scheduling of Classes	1.484
Demands from Faculty	5.249
Faculty's Hesitancy to Explain Assignments	1.048

χ^2 - Not significant at .05

Table 12

School Sources of Stress
by Year of Enrollment

	Chi Square
No Cafeteria	.561
No Student Center for Graduates	2.884
Appearance of School Building	6.858
Student Organization	2.099

χ^2 , Not significant at .05

Table 13

Academic Financial Sources of Stress
by Year of Enrollment

	Chi Square
Cost of Required Textbooks	6.924
Cost of Tuition and Fees	2.15
No College Workstudy	4.47
Very Low Scholarship Assistance	2.28
Unavailable Scholarship for AUSSW	2.5708

χ^2 , Not significant at .05

Table 14

Personal Sources of Stress by Year of Enrollment

	Chi Square
Change in Financial Status	5.63
Lack of Money for Travel	5.33
Lack of Money for Luxuries	3.33
Lack of Money for Medical Needs	*13.46

* χ^2 , Significant at .05 and .01

To further analyze the sources of stress among first and second year graduate students, the total items for each source category, reported as causing excessive stress, were combined for both years of enrollment and the mean score computed. Table 15 shows the rank order of these categories. Demonstrated in the table, Personal Finances head the list as a source causing excessive stress, followed by academic

finances. The table also shows that academic sources ranked third and school sources fell at the bottom of ranking.

Table 15
General Factors Causing Excessive Stress
for Both Years of Enrollment

	Mean Stress Score
Personal Finances	19.0
Academic Finances	17.8
Academic	12.0
Housing	11.0
Family	10.6
Personal	8.1
Relationship	8.0
School	7.0

Implications for Social Work Practice

Stress is inevitable, and can present crippling effects on a large proportion of the population. Graduate students are not immune to stress. Stress may interfere with the students' capacity to study and may have notable consequences on their productive efficiency.

Social workers encounter clients that are under stress. If as students, they learn how to detect stress, and how to cope with it, they will be better able to assist clients in their plight to cope, and thus improve the quality of their lives.

As a result of this study, social work educators should be better informed of the causes of stress and how to assist students in coping with stress. They should become more aware of their roles in reducing sources of stress, thus providing more positive learning environments.

CHAPTER VI

Summary and Conclusions

The results of this study show that first and second year students experience a moderate level of stress. In comparing the two years of enrollment, the results show that there is no significant difference in the level of stress among this population. Further results show that the level of stress among the students is significantly different according to housing arrangements. Other factors such as sex and marital status, showed no significant differences. The results also showed that a difference exists in the somatic reactions to stress among the population. The two classes showed a significant difference in their reaction to "sweating palms," when faced with a stressful situation. The data analysis also showed that there is a significant difference in the source of stress for first and second year students. The students responded differently to "A lack of money for medical needs," "Inadequate bathroom, indorm," and to "lack of privacy." All of these factors may be attributed to the different housing arrangements of the students, also to their financial arrangements.

The first hypothesis that there is no difference in the level of stress among first and second year students is supported by the results. The second hypothesis, there is no difference in the somatic reactions to stress among first and second year students is supported by the analysis for all but one item, "sweating palms." Finally, the third hypothesis, there is no difference in the sources of stress among first

and second year students is also supported by the analysis for all items, except for (1) lack of privacy, (2) lack of money for medical needs and (3) inadequate bathroom in dorm.

The fact that graduate students experience a moderate level of stress is of particular importance to social work educators. Therefore, the following recommendations are made based on the analysis of the study data.

Recommendations

1. Flexible, and accommodating strategies should be developed in consensus with students and faculty, to reduce stress among the student body.
2. More sources of financial assistance needs to be made available to the students.
3. A graduate student center should be developed for the intellectual exchange and social satisfaction of the students.

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
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APPENDIX A

February 27, 1984.
Box 377, Atlanta University
Atlanta, Georgia 30314

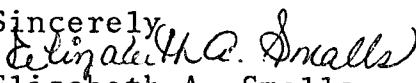
Dr. Clarence Coleman, Dean
Atlanta University School
of Social Work
50 Chestnut Street, S.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30314

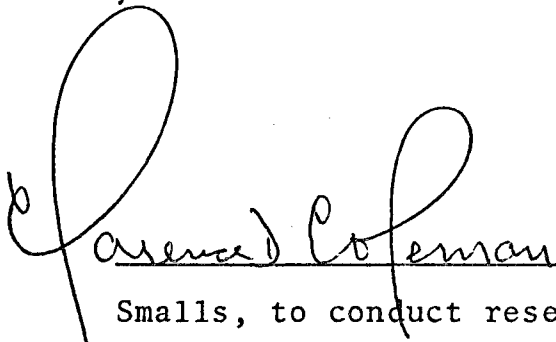
Dear Dean Coleman:

I am presently involved in research at Atlanta University School of Social Work, and would like your permission to administer my questionnaire to the student body.

I am seeking information concerning the students' perceptions of the level, reactions, and sources of stress during their educational careers. Your assistance in this matter will be greatly appreciated.

Please sign the permission form below. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Smalls

 I have granted permission to Elizabeth Smalls, to conduct research at Atlanta University School of Social Work.

Dear Colleagues:

As a student at Atlanta University School of Social Work, I am concerned with the stress experienced by the student body. Your assistance is important.

The questionnaires are attached and will take 10 minutes to complete. Participation in this study is on a voluntary basis. Your identity is confidential, please select a pen name for this purpose. Your cooperation for this study is appreciated.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Smalls

Stress - the occurrence of life events believed to be difficult for most people.

Reactions - body changes when under stressful conditions

Sources - specific stressors that cause anxiety or stress.

PEN NAME _____

I volunteer to participate in the study on stress

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

417 BRUCE V. MOORE BUILDING
UNIVERSITY PARK, PENNSYLVANIA 16802

College of the Liberal Arts
Department of Psychology

Area Code 814
865-9514

March 2, 1984

Ms. Elizabeth Small
Box 377, Atlanta University
Atlanta, GA 30314

Dear Ms. Small:

Thank you for your interest in my Somatic Perception Questionnaire.

I am enclosing a copy of the questionnaire and suggest the following three references:

1. Guthrie, G. M., Verstraete, A., Deines, M. & Stern, R.M.
Symptoms of stress in four societies. Journal of Social Psychology, 1975, 95, 165-172.
2. Shields, S. & Stern, R.M. Emotion: The perception of bodily change. In P. Pliner, K.R. Blankstein, & I.M. Spigel (Eds.), Perception of Emotion in Self and Others. New York: Plenum, 1979.
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If I can be of further help, don't hesitate to contact me again.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Stern
Professor and Head

APPENDIX B

SOURCE OF STRESS STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

DIRECTIONS: Below are (8) categories of sources that may cause stress or anxiety. Rate EACH condition under these categories using the following code: 0=None, 1=Little, 2=Moderate, 3=Excessive

I. FAMILY

- ☐ Leaving Home
- ☐ Demands From Family
- ☐ Familys' Expectations
- ☐ Disruptions In Family Routine
- ☐ Death Of Family Member

II. HOUSING

- ☐ Poor Housing Accomodations
- ☐ Inadequate Bathroom, in Dorm
- ☐ Lack Of Privacy
- ☐ Roach/Rat infestations
- ☐ Inadequate Kitchen Equipment

III. PERSONAL

- ☐ Inability To Concentrate
- ☐ Lack Of Motivation
- ☐ Self-doubt
- ☐ Poor Study Habits
- ☐ Adjusting To Graduate School
- ☐ Lack Of Confidence
- ☐ Lack Of Adequate Time For Tasks
- ☐ Poor Preparation For Graduate School

IV. RELATIONSHIPS

- ☐ Change In Social Activities
- ☐ Finding New Friends
- ☐ Limited Access To Students From Other Schools
- ☐ Lack Of Understanding From Mate
- ☐ Seperation From Mate
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Faculty/Student Relationship

V. ACADEMIC

- ☐ Failing a Test
- ☐ Inability To Understand Assignments
- ☐ Class Presentations
- ☐ Substantive Paper/Thesis
- ☐ Taking Exams
- ☐ Communication Skills Exam
- ☐ Scheduling Of Classes
- ☐ Demands From Faculty
- ☐ Faculty's Hesitancy To Explain Assignments

VI. SCHOOL

- ☐ No Cafeteria
- ☐ No Student Center For Graduates
- ☐ Appearance Of School Building
- ☐ Student Organization

VII. PERSONAL FINANCES

- ☐ Change In Financial Status
- ☐ Lack Of Money For Travel
- ☐ Lack Of Money For Luxuries
- ☐ Lack Of Money For Medical Needs

VIII. ACADEMIC FINANCES

- ☐ Cost Of Required Textbooks
- ☐ Cost Of Tuition And Fees
- ☐ No College Workstudy
- ☐ Very Low Scholarship Assistance
- ☐ Unavailable Scholarship From Atlanta University School Of Social Work